

AR 98

To the Secretary of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations. R

(Copy to the UNESCO General Secretary)

Dear Sir:

On August 4, 1976, one of the most telling events of the current Argentine situation took place. In a press conference that was reported in most Argentine newspapers and reproduced in full in the next day's issue of the newspaper "la Nación", General Acdel Vilas, Chief of the Fifth Army, headquartered in the city of Bahía Blanca, where the National Southern University (Universidad Nacional del Sur), is also located, announced the uncovering of an "international conspiracy" for "ideological and socio-cultural infiltration" with the object of the ideological shaping of "subversive criminals" at that university. Vilas announced the arrest of fifteen former professors of the university, most of them from the Economics Department, a student and a member of the non-academic staff. Most of those who would be tried for this "crime" had been already arrested at the beginning of July. He also gave a list of fourteen more former professors and two members of the union of the non-academic staff who were under warrant and presumed to be fugitive. In October and November at least nine more former professors were arrested, some of whom were later released. The former Dean of the Bahía Blanca branch of the National Technological University (Facultad Regional) de la Universidad Tecnológica Nacional) was also arrested and a list was given of twenty seven more fugitives, although from the information that was given out and from other sources it seems that the number of those arrested and wanted is probably higher. Among those arrested there were some well known intellectuals, like the former Rector of the University, Víctor Benamo, and the economic historian Horacio Ciafardini, author of several books on Argentine economic history; other well known economists such as Carlos Adolfo Barrera and Dolio Sfascia were also arrested. Among those wanted were Dr. Gustavo Malek, another former Rector and former Minister of Education (the order for his arrest seems to have been dropped afterwards); the former academic secretary of the University, Augusto M. Pérez Lindo; the former Chairman of the Economics Department, Enrique Rubén Melchior; the former academic secretary of the Humanities Department, Mario Merlino; the former Rector of Comahue National University, Roberto Domecq; the economist José Luis Coraggio, historian José Carlos Chiaramonte, literary critic Jaime Rest, and even a Catholic priest.

One June 2nd of 1977 it was announced that the Federal Court of Appeals in the city of Bahía Blanca confirmed the preventive detention ("prisión preventiva" in the Argentine legal system this means that the judge is supposed to have strong proof "semi-plena prueba") of six of the accused, including Ciafardini, former Economics professors Eduardo Villamil, Héctor Pistonessi Castelli, Carlos Adolfo Barrera, Alberto Barbeito and former Humanities professor Mario Usabiaga. It is also known that the accused are imprisoned in the towns of La

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Margaret P. Grafield, Director

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Plata and Trelew, some six hundred kilometers from their place of residence, that several of them have been mistreated forcing them to sleep naked on the floor in winter nights and that one attempted suicide. The accused are defended by court appointed lawyers. In many cases political prisoners do not find lawyers in Argentina now, because some fifty lawyers who used to defend political prisoners have been kidnapped by the paramilitary and parapolice gangs, and many of these have been found murdered, some with incredible brutality, and many others have been forced to flee the country.

The illicit conduct of the accused, according to the public accusation pronounced at the press conference of General Vilas, consisted, first, in holding ideas different from those implicit in the official philosophy, which is usually referred to as being within "the principles of Western Christian civilization"; second, in having studied Economics at Buenos Aires University, together with other students who had "Socialist tendencies" because "they were given the opportunity of studying Economics from a political historical point of view"; third, in having studied in foreign universities such as the National University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), the University of Colorado, the University of Grenoble and other highly prestigious academic centers; fourth, of having used lies and deception to influence their best students, with whom they formed a group known as "the ideological elite of international Economics"; fifth, in having used their influence for getting jobs for their students or colleagues as professors in other universities or as advisers to Provincial governments; sixth, in having used academic freedom for ideological penetration, because "academic freedom allows the professor to choose the ideological thrust he likes, within an unobjectionable scheme"; seventh, of having used their influence to add to all academic majors a course of Political Economics; eighth, of having participated in committees that designed the curriculum for the Bachelors of Economics (licenciatura) giving it a clearcut Marxist ideological content; ninth, of having written analyses of the Argentine economic situation which contained "false and ominous judgements about the economic situation of Patagonia"; and finally of having allowed books from the publishing house Siglo XXI to be sold at university bookstores (this publishing house, one of the most important in Spanish, was closed down by the Junta after the coup).

The "proofs" shown by General Vilas at his press conference consisted of books seized at the houses of the accused, such as "The Open Veins of Latinamerica" by Eduardo Galeano, "Fundamental Concepts of Historical Materialism" by Marta Harnecker, the Education Law of the Socialist Republic of Romania, short stories by Julio Cortázar and a history of Chinese literature, according to information published in "La Nación" and pictures of the exhibit of "subversive" material published in the magazines "Gente" and "Siete Días".

To punish these "crimes" the government intends to apply retroactively the monstrous "security law" passed by the Junta, which bans "proselytism and indoctrination" at universities.

That such grotesque accusations could be seriously taken by most Argentine newspapers; that the Vilas' press conference could have been shown on television, and that no one dared give a public answer, shows the climate under which Argentina is living today. To be an idea of the climate in the Bahía Blanca area we could mention that the Departments of Economics and Humanities of the Universidad Nacional del Sur had already been closed down before the March 24 coup; that even before the coup forces of repression had assassinated students and members of the non-teaching staff union, one of these while he was in his hospital bed after having been injured in a previous attack; that after the coup the forces of repression assassinated Juan Carlos Prádanos and Manuel Tarchinsky, former professors of the Universidad Nacional del Sur and some twenty students of the local branch of the Technological University. The Argentine government has created a climate of unprecedented terrorism and ideological persecution, including book burnings and massive assassinations, all this tolerated, encouraged and executed by the commands of the Armed Forces, in such a way that it brings to mind the worst atrocities of German Nazism. The aberration, without precedent in Argentine legal history, in which the judges are even admitting these unworthy accusations and raving theories of conspiracy, can be explained not only by the general climate of intimidation created by the Junta but also by the total purge of the judiciary that took place after the coup, in which more than a thousand judges and judiciary officials were fired, in order to have a compliant judiciary that would be a tool of ferocious repression.

The purpose of these trials is to turn the teaching of a theory that displeases official ideologists into a crime. The Argentine government has mounted a monstrous show trial based on the crime of thought and opinion, because only if the existence of such "crimes" is admitted can such worthless accusations be considered as the one that the victims were handing down a Marxist ideological education to their students.

This ideological persecution is not an accident. It is part of Junta policy, as confirmed by concomitant events such as book burnings -shown on television-, purging of university libraries and even the seizure of books from private libraries -some ten thousand books were taken from the homes of teachers and students at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo-, and even the closing down of publishing houses and the kidnapping, murder and/or arrest of their publishers, managers or employees, as in the cases of the publishing houses Siglo XXI, De la Flor,

Cartago and others; and the banning of books of local and foreign authors, etc. That ideological persecution is government policy is confirmed by statements of high government officials, as shown by a press conference held by General Luciano A. Jáuregui, a member of the Army Chiefs of Staff. General Jáuregui reported in this conference ("La Opinión" of 4.21.77) on the "struggle against subversion", and fully endorsed General Vilas' line by speaking out openly against academic freedom at the universities, because, he said, it might be used to "ideologically win over teachers, students and the non-teaching staff" through "a malicious manipulation of bibliographies".

These facts should alarm all those interested in the future of education, of science and of culture, wherever they might be. A conspiracy has been fabricated to turn into crimes the teaching of a scientific theory, the free election of bibliography by a professor who is teaching a course and the power of professors of a Department to decide on a curriculum. The victims, who have been chosen as scapegoats, have been subjected to character assassination, imprisonment and mistreatment, and they do not have the slightest chance of giving a public reply to their accusers and much less of having a fair trial, because the climate of fear created by the Junta in general and exacerbated in this particular case, has destroyed any possibility of justice. Public opinion in the whole world, and particularly scientists and intellectuals, should act to put an end to this political and legal monstrosity.

We are, therefore, asking all organizations of scientists and intellectuals everywhere, and also international organizations concerned with the cause of education, science and culture, such as UNESCO, that they raise their protest against this attack on culture, and demand the end of this trial and the liberty of the accused.

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SIGNATURE

INSTITUTION